

TRAVEL

Mechanical museum is a 'Marvelous' attraction

Marvin's Marvelous Mechanical Museum is in Hunter's Square on the west side of Orchard Lake Road (between 13 and 14 Mile Road), Farmington Hills, (810) 626-5020. Hours are 10 a.m. to 11 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and noon to 9 p.m. Sundays.

BY DIANE HANSON
SPECIAL WRITER

Flags wave, Chuck-E-Cheese characters sing and roll their eyes, radio control planes "fly" on a wire high above your head, pinballs ding and flash, old puppet theaters perform, holograms eerily dance and move lifelike from the recesses of a coin-operated machine and an old card-dealing granny waits to predict your future as you enter the building. Let Grandma Tell You! will come true as long as you activate her with a quarter.

Marvin's Marvelous Mechanical Museum in Farmington Hills is indisputably unique. Packed with hundreds of new and antique arcade, slide-show, video and mechanical machines and other items, it would take some time to discover and play each one.

"I started with one machine," confessed Marvin Yagoda, owner of the marvelous museum he established in 1980. "It was a horn phonograph. Then I went for a Nickelodeon and then I started collecting all kinds of stuff. I travel all over looking for things."

Yagoda's oldest working piece

FAMILY FUN

In the museum is a viewer from the 1890s where you can see the cards flip by in a primitive motion picture.

One of the most unusual attractions is P.T. Barnum's Cardiff Giant. The original 11 foot high, 2,000 pound stone giant was "unearthed" by some folks in Cardiff, N.Y., in 1869 and proclaimed an ancient giant species that roamed the eastern turf long, long ago. It proved to be a great money-making hoax.

"The real hoax is now in the New York Museum at Cooperstown," explained Yagoda. "When Barnum saw them making all the money, he wanted to buy it and they wouldn't sell it to him so Barnum made his own hoax of the hoax." Yagoda is now the proud owner of Barnum's enormous double hoax.

But what seems to be the biggest attraction for today's crowds are the arcade and video games.

"I have the latest videos and the earliest arcade games," he said. "I've got the whole gamut."

Nik Grank, 17, of Farmington Hills admitted, "I come here a lot. It's a good place for the kids to come, spend money and not get into any trouble. It's kind of a hang-out." The North Farmington High School graduate plans to attend Michigan State in the fall.

The unconventional museum has equal attraction for the pint-sized crowd. As 4-year-old Kelsey Collins of Redford Township cruised happily up and down on a

rescued Chuck-E-Cheese airplane, sister Kriston, 8, proclaimed, "I think it's really fun."

His parents, Sue and Dave Collins, agree. "It's always fun to find places to take the kids," said Dave Collins. "We try to do stuff as a family."

And certainly there is enough nostalgia packed into the place to satisfy parents, grandparents and beyond. From nickelodeons to old signs, even the old Sinclair and Richfield gas pumps with the glass light on top. Remember five cents a gallon? Clocks that run backwards proclaim that Marvin's is a place where you "step back in time."

There's even an old-time picture booth where you and your friends can go and mug it up together. Memories were made of this and, thanks to Marvin's, still can be.

Ann Shina, 13, of West Bloomfield, confessed that Marvin's is "fun for all ages." She and her sister, Chanel, 12, along with cousin, Teri Shammas, 11, had just stepped out of the picture booth with a strip of smiling, contrived faces in hand.

Where else can you go to have this kind of fun for mere change? Admission to the museum is absolutely free and the games will operate with the insertion of any amount from one penny to one dollar. The vast majority of the fascinating playthings will provide entertainment for just one quarter. They also offer very reasonable birthday party packages including food from the snack bar and quarters to slide into the slots.

A word of caution to parents with excited children in tow: it would be wise to present a limit on the amount of cold cash you are willing to shell out per kid. It is easy to get caught up in the fun and frenzy of going from machine to machine. I know, I watched my three boys aged 14, 10 and eight, my youngest daughter, seven, and their significantly older father, slide the silver into the slots with fascinated smiles on their faces. I could only get them out of that marvelous place by promising to bring them all back again real soon.

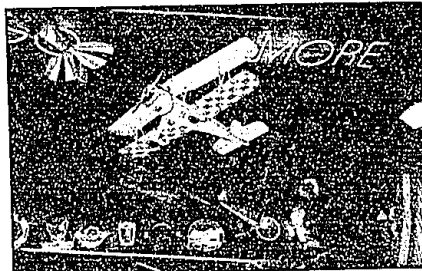
Of all the hundreds of intriguing marvels, which one might be Marvin's favorite? "They're all my favorites," he confessed. "I'm just like a kid, I can't pick a favorite."

Diane Hanson of Canton is a freelance writer, and mother of six.



DIANE HANSON

Going for a ride: Four-year-old Kelsey Collins enjoys the plane ride as her parents Dave and Sue look on.



Flying machine: High flying radio controlled planes are wired at Marvin's Marvelous Mechanical Museum.

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